

THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE

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States ~~have been~~ founded, world orders created and maintained by violence and the threat of violence. Violence and threat of violence: these have been held the ~~ultimate~~ ultimate, the crucial bases of power. Yet in a day when the ability to apply violence ^{is} ~~has grown~~ vastly greater than ever before, its relationship to power has grown suddenly obscure. The uses of violence and the means-of-violence are in question. ~~What~~ ~~Exactly~~ Precisely how do the new weapons affect strategic relationships, ~~and~~ patterns of influence? For whom, and in what way, do they create opportunities?

These questions first became ~~acute~~ acute for the United States when ~~a~~ second nation~~s~~ acquired the atomic bomb. Commenting on this event in 1950, one writer had this to say:

"The Soviet Union, by quickly bringing our monopoly to an end, radically altered the strategic situation to its own advantage. United States ability to deliver bombs in Russia is now largely neutralized by the ability of the Soviet to deliver atomic bombs in the United States and ~~Europe~~ Western Europe. Perhaps the position is more than neutralized, for our economy may be more vulnerable than that of the Soviet Union to atomic attack." (151)

~~This conclusion may have been premature; the Soviet Union had at that time no Long-Range Air Force capable of delivering bombs on the United States. But they acquired one;~~

The reasoning here is not quite obvious. Clearly the ability of the US to drop bombs on Russia is not limited by their ability to retaliate; but ~~that~~ ^{their} ability raises the expected costs of our strike, so that the ^{and} credibility, ~~hence~~ the usefulness, of our nuclear threats are weakened.

This conclusion may ~~xxx~~ have been premature; the Soviet Union had at that time no Long-Range Air Force capable of delivering bombs on the United States. But they acquired this: and the hydrogen bomb as well. These developments would not seem to weaken the argument. Yet it was after those events that the writer of the above statement, John Foster Dulles, announced that it had become the policy of the United States to rely ~~on~~ more heavily than ever before upon the threat of nuclear attack: to deter not only attack on the United States but "peripheral" aggression anywhere on the globe.

He seemed to have concluded that our ability had not been neutralized so definitely after all. Yet his earlier view survived--in the hands of his critics. ~~In conjunction with that comment in 1950, Dulles had made a prediction on a subject that is just now beginning to receive attention:~~

~~"One possibility~~

In his 1950 book, "War ~~xxxxxxx~~ or Peace," Dulles had gone on to say:

"The rapid ~~xxx~~ Soviet development of the atomic bomb is indeed a 'gigantic success for the Soviet state'; and the ending of the United States monopoly in this field will have widespread repercussions which cannot yet be fully foreseen.

"One possibility that we can and must foresee is that the possession of atomic weapons greatly increases the area within which the Soviet Communist leaders and the leaders of ~~xxx~~ local Communist parties can exert terroristic threats...Now there is far more scope for the use of such terroristic methods, and increased likelihood of winning over the governments and peoples of countries which are highly vulnerable to atomic attack by Soviet Russia." 15?

This may seem a little inconsistent with preceding conclusion. If our ability is neutralized, why not Russia's? One explanation might harmonize both these statements with each other, and also with Dulles' ~~xxxxxxx~~ later policy. The sharing of this ability tends to neutralize threats by one party, but does not entirely succeed; such threats become less credible than if they were based on an atomic monopoly, but they are not wholly incredible. Hence both parties may still find uses for them.

In terms of our earlier discussion, atomic weapons have two striking characteristics as tools of blackmail. First, the outcome of an atomic strike is so ghastly compared to practically any demand the blackmailer might make, that a prospective victim can accept only a small risk of it if he is to resist. In other words, he will comply if he ~~xxx~~ assigns even a small probability to the threat's being carried out; in our earlier terms, his "willingness to resist" is ~~xx~~ very low. The blackmailer need make his threat only slightly convincing.

On the other hand, to the extent that ~~xxxxxx~~ retaliation is to be expected, the costs of carrying out such a threat become very high for the blackmailer. It may be ~~ix~~ difficult for him to commit himself to it; and even if he could, it would more difficult to make his commitment even slightly convincing to the opponent. Thus, commitment can be very risky; he may well be reluctant to try it. The blackmailer has a low "willingness to commit"; he will commit himself to a nuclear threat only if he assigns very low probability to the possibility that he will fail to influence or deter.

Nuclear blackmail requires, then, high confidence that the opponent will assign at least low probability to the threatened action.

Commitment, in other words, requires high confidence that the opponent will assign at least low probability to the threatened action.

It has been widely believed that either blackmail or attack against a major nuclear power is out of the question, because it is certain to meet with major retaliation.

This belief has been based on the mistaken assumption that atomic weapons are themselves peculiarly invulnerable to attack. In fact, this is true neither of planes nor of missiles, both of which can be destroyed on the ground unless extremely costly and complex precautions are taken to protect them. As Albert Wohlstetter indicates in his article, "The Delicate Balance of Terror," it can not be taken for granted that these precautions will be taken. If they are not, a first strike by an aggressor might involve very little risk of retaliation.

In a situation between these two, a world where an aggressor would have to accept a considerable risk of retaliation, there still could be powerful incentives to strike first; we will examine these later. But a less risky use of ~~xxxx~~ his weapons would be to support blackmail. Even a threat that promised mutual suicide might be effective. If the price demanded of the victim ^{were} ~~ix~~ moderate, his "willingness to resist" would be very low. To achieve a small probability in the opponent's mind that he might carry out the threat, the blackmailer need only convince him either that: a) his own actions are, to a small degree, unpredictable, erratic, irrational or subject to outside influences; or (b) there is at least a small chance that he has committed himself, on the basis of his belief that the victim is very unlikely to resist. The blackmailer, in other words, need not pretend that he is indifferent to suicide, that he would accept a large risk of suicide--determined either by random impulse or by commitment--to gain his ends. But he may find it quite feasible, and quite ~~xxxxxx~~ sufficient, to convince his opponent of what is, in fact, true: that he is willing to take/what he estimates as a very small risk of suicide to achieve his goal.

That the new weapons seem to lend themselves more advantageously to threats ~~xxxxx~~ than to direct combat use does not make them entirely novel; there has been a trend in this direction ever since military technology ~~xxxx~~ became industrialized. Certainly by ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ 1914 it was true--though few perceived it--that conflict between two roughly equal powers or coalitions was highly likely to result in stalemate, a war of attrition that would be immensely costly to both sides relative to any issues that might be initially at stake. Already, war/had ceased to be a useful means toward political ends: toward ^{against equals} gaining territory, influencing policies, acquiring prestige, solidifying alliances, deciding controversies. It remained something ~~xxxxxx~~ that might have been threatened; but commitments to such threats might have been made very cautiously.

One difference between that day and this was that these costs of war--the negative payoffs that ^{were likely} ~~outweighed~~ any possible rewards that war might bring--were seen much less clearly then than they are now. Although there was ^{genuine} ~~general~~ apprehension about a European war, there was at the same time a general belief that, whoever won, the end would be quick. ~~There was~~ The image of the war, not only in the popular mind but among professional military planners, was Almost no one foresaw the possibilities of stalemate: in particular, the abilities of the warring economies to keep their mass armies supplied with ammunition and equipment after the initial weeks. At any rate, all the parties proceeded to commit themselves much more readily and thoroughly than they might have done if they had appreciated the risks they were taking.

The lessons that war taught them helped make them ~~xx~~ vulnerable in the next. First, they learned how terrible was war. This knowledge

made the threat of war a powerful tool in the hands of a blackmailer: in the hands of anyone who could conjure up even a slight risk of war. The Allies had discovered that very little was important compared to the costs of war; hence, their willingness to resist, the risk of war they would accept, became very low ~~xxx~~ even when relatively great political issues were at stake. Their willingness to commit themselves, to deter an aggressor or influence a controversy, became equally low; they resolved, ~~xx~~ this time, to retain their freedom of action, ~~xxx~~ their freedom to be rational. Which meant, then as always (and this is not to condemn it) their freedom to surrender to threats.

In the second place, the Western Powers became so impressed with the power of the defensive that they came to think that stalemate was inevitable. This was a happy conclusion, for them: hence, it was believed with great intensity. Actually, it was not quite true even in the First World War. It was not at all inevitable that the Schlieffen Plan, as first designed, should fail; and if it had not, as Raymond Aron suggests, Europe would not have discovered/^{stalemate}so soon, the full potentialities of total war. At any rate, the development of the airplane and the tank proceeded to make it quite untrue: as the Allies discovered when class met again in France and the Lowlands. The fundamental conviction that an aggressor could not possibly hope for success had led--as it always does--to decisions and omissions that created the aggressor's opportunities. For when ~~xxx~~ a nation is convinced that deterrence is virtually automatic --when it believes that an aggressor will never attack--it is naturally reluctant to devote effort and ingenuity, and above all, to spend money, merely to improve that deterrence: to make even more certain its ability to contain or to retaliate.

Moreover, there is great resistance to repairing these omissions even when the illusions on which they are founded begin to fail. The first hints that there may be gaps in the defenses--that an aggressor might possibly have ~~xxxxxxx~~ reasonable hopes of successful attack--come hand in hand with some very unpleasant implications. ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxx~~

~~xxxxxxxxxxx~~ The decision-maker who accepts them must be prepared:

1) to change his own planning assumptions; 2) to acknowledge that he or advocated, or defended, has made/some past decisions on the basis of mistaken beliefs: i.e., wrong decisions; 3) to recognize, and live with, the possibility that war may occur, after all; 4) to acknowledge ~~xxxx~~ his own mistaken evaluations have contributed to a present risk of war; 5) to advocate (in the face of less well informed resistance) devoting large resources to repairing the defences: either levying new taxes for this purpose or cutting into programs already scheduled.

The chances are that the new information is available only to the decision-maker most directly concerned; or that he is the only one who knows ^{its} ~~xxx~~ technical implications. There is, then, no pressure on him from the public, or perhaps even his superiors, to act on, discuss, or even reveal the information. He hates to admit the above implications even to himself; he loathes the thought of confessing them to legislators, bearing their abuse and fighting to overcome their own reluctance to believe or act. On the other hand, he doesn't like to lie. At this early stage, there is a simple solution: he need not believe the information. It is, after all, ambiguous; it is scant; it is controversial. There are authorities more expert than he who discredit it. True, a nasty ^{special incentives} mind can imagine ~~xxxxxxx~~ for them, too, to be skeptical: but why impugn their motives? Wishfulness takes over and resolves the question, quite unconsciously. He does not decide to disbelieve these reports; he simply finds, quite honestly, that he does not believe them.

Time goes by. The reports become more insistent, more detailed, more coherent. ~~The ambiguity~~ Among the experts, the ambiguity, the controversy ^{ies} ^{ies} treacherously begin to dissipate. There are still authorities who deny, but their voices are more shrill, their special interests less easy to ignore. The decision-maker begins to confront the spectre: If I don't tell, someone else will. He starts to calculate risks. How convincing would this information be, coming from someone outside this office, to the legislature? To the public? Exactly how likely is it to be true; what is the margin for error? Supposing there are opportunities for an aggressor: how likely is he to know about them? Knowing them, how likely is he to act on them? How soon?

One thought cannot be quite kept down: What would happen to him and his administration if he should frankly reveal his past omissions, the country's present or imminent danger, and the need for new sacrifices? Put baldly, he quite realizes that this is an ignoble ~~consideration~~ ^{criterion.} But there are related considerations. Would it benefit the country to change administrations, ~~as a~~ in a fit of pique? Might not the country panic, jeopardizing all present policies and hope of improvement? What would the effect on allies ^{be} of learning this vulnerability? Most important of all, might not this reveal these weakness to the enemy ~~fixxx~~ ~~fixxx~~ ~~fixxx~~ authoritatively? If the revelation were combined with a public program to eliminate the vulnerabilities, would this not be a powerful incentive to attack?

Clearly, this is no time for reckless revelation. After calculating all the risks, he may well decide for concealment: combined, of course, with a vigorous program to remedy the deficiencies. What he ~~does~~ probably does not foresee is that the ~~program~~ vigor of this program is considerably jeopardized by this secrecy. His information may never get to those who

must take crucial supporting decisions. With no public pressure on bureaucrats or legislators, a sense of urgency is hard to maintain. Inevitably, the program bumps up against better-understood and more popular programs competing for public funds; inevitably, it comes off worst. After all, it is impossible to fight for it vigorously without telling the enemy (and ^{suffering} other unpleasant consequences, which need not be mentioned). *(and all these others).*

The program languishes. And as time goes by, with no attack, the decision-maker begins to find it possible to disbelieve the danger once more. He can live even with the public awareness and the growing certainty that the enemy has a deadly capability; in the effort to believe that the enemy will not use this capability, practice makes perfect. From time to time, events jolt him into reconsidering the whole question of revealing the growing gap and entering a "crash program" to close it. (I have been describing, in general terms, the issue of the airplane gap between Germany and Great Britain in the Thirties). But each time he returns to it, the reasons for not taking this course are more compelling than before. The public is already restive, the allies growing apprehensive. The discrepancies are larger, the tasks to be shouldered are heavier, the past omissions to be confessed more grave; and to them ^{is} ~~are~~ added a culpability for not taking steps sooner. The enemy is beginning to acquire a decisive advantage; the dangers of spelling this out for him, and threatening to eliminate it, are real and serious.

In the end, he tells; or he does not tell. Either way, the potential aggressor has managed to acquire a striking force that cannot be contained, or which may preclude retaliation. A good weapon for blackmail.

Thus, the conviction that an opponent cannot possibly acquire the ability to make ~~xxxxxxx~~ threats is an important aid to that opponent ~~in his process of acquiring~~ as he proceeds to acquire that ability. Thus Baldwin aided Hitler. Churchill recounts with great passion Baldwin's progress from his statement.....to his admission....

(Churchill had earned for himself during this period a reputation similar to that of Joe Alsop). By 1938, Hitler's Air Force cast a shadow over every bargaining table. In the opinion of Edward Heade Earle, Germany's victory at Munich "was primarily a victory for the Luftwaffe and perhaps the greatest victory of its entire existence." (Turner, History of Military Affairs in Western Society, 774). "It is significant to remember that the measures suggested to avoid a recurrence of the debacle were almost exclusively concerned with the provision of planes and more planes, anti-aircraft batteries, air-raid shelters, and civilian defences."

To suggest that the above description might apply to contemporary American decision-makers would be controversial. Therefore let me ~~hasten to~~ renounce that interpretation. Still, it is worth noting that two basic conditions that prepared the ground for Hitler's blackmail are present today. To begin with, ~~xxx~~ thanks now to the nature of atomic weapons, the "willingness to resist" of any nation, small or large--the probability of atomic war it is willing to incur in bargaining for an advantage--must be relatively low. Even an implausible threat of atomic attack can be persuasive.--unless it is terribly implausible, or the stakes are unusually high. Second, there is the widespread belief that, in fact, atomic attack is not merely implausible but practically impossible, because of the "balance of terror." This is based on the

belief that ~~retaliation~~ retaliation is cheap, devastating, ~~simple~~ reliable, and automatic in operation. The point is not merely that these beliefs are wrong, but that they might possibly have the same effects on defense decisions as the British beliefs in the Thirties that war was unthinkable. ~~When~~ ^{some event} ~~is impossible~~ is impossible in any case, why spend money to prevent it? The attitude is logical, and it leads to policies that tend to make the event less impossible.

The result of the British attitude was that, starting with an unwillingness to accept even small risks of war, they gradually found that their enemy had become able to present them with big risks as the only alternative to surrender: big risks not only in the sense that he could now damage them severely, but that he had ~~advantages~~ strategic advantages which might well have encouraged him to commit himself, in the belief that his own risks were small. In other words, his threats looked powerful, if he were likely to carry them out; and he did seem likely to carry them out. The ~~risks~~ risks his opponents were willing to accept had meanwhile grown no larger.

It is at least conceivable that our attitude could have the same result: that our belief that war could no longer effectively be threatened might blind us to a development that was giving an opponent the ability to make his threats convincing. Such an opponent would have discovered what so many current writers have called for: the way to translate the power of nuclear weapons, the power to annihilate, into political power, the power to influence behavior.

Just as Hitler and his generals ~~demonstrated~~ in Poland, France and the Low Countries demonstrated that the direct use of military force, the offensive/could still be highly profitable, so it is conceivable that an aggressor could find ~~positive~~ rewards from a nuclear